

Bush wants director who'll reshape CIA

By Timothy J. McNulty
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WASHINGTON—With the announcement Wednesday that William Webster is retiring as director of central intelligence, President Bush now aims to appoint a successor at the CIA who will reshape the nation's intelligence operations to fit the post-Cold War era.

Now that East-West tensions have lessened, administration and congressional leaders say intelligence-gathering must go beyond traditional spying on political and military secrets and focus on economic reporting and such critical regions as the Middle East.

Though Bush said he was not yet prepared to name a successor to Webster, administration officials said Wednesday that three of the most likely candidates are James Lilley, a Bush friend and career CIA officer who on Friday ends a two-year tour as ambassador to China; retired Adm. Bobby Ray Inman, former head of the National Security Agency; and Robert Gates, deputy national security adviser and a former deputy CIA director.

Webster, a former federal judge and later director of the FBI, told Bush on Tuesday that he wanted to leave the nation's chief intelligence post. He was appointed four years ago in the midst of the Iran-contra scandal and his reputation for integrity helped restore the spy agency's stature following the reign of the late William Casey.

A former appellate and District Court judge and U.S. attorney in St. Louis, Webster was appointed to head the FBI in 1978 by President Jimmy Carter. In 1987, he was appointed to replace Casey, who resigned and underwent surgery for a brain tumor. Webster said he will return to the private sector, but he did not specify what he would do next.

"I believe Bill Webster has demonstrated the value of an intelligence organization that is professionally directed," Bush said at a news briefing.

Bush said Webster had done a superb job and he hated to see him go.

Standing alongside the president in the White House briefing room, Webster seemed to be answering critics of the agency by

saying that he was leaving behind "a healthy organization, one that has had during the last four years a good track record."

When asked about U.S. intelligence performance, especially anticipating the intentions of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein before the Persian Gulf war, Bush said he had "no complaints whatsoever" about the work done by the CIA and other intelligence agencies.

The president, himself a former CIA director, takes a personal interest in intelligence matters, insisting on a verbal—not just written—intelligence briefing every morning, even when he is on vacation.

Of the three leading contenders to replace Webster, each man has a professional or personal tie to the president.

Although trained as an analyst of Soviet affairs, Gates is also known for his administrative skills. He spent several years on the National Security Council staff and rose rapidly through the CIA ranks, becoming deputy director for intelligence and then deputy CIA director.

Though relatively young at 47, Gates was the first man nominated by Reagan to succeed Casey, even before Webster. But Gates withdrew his name when it became clear he would be rejected by a Congress that was skeptical of the CIA's participation in the Iran-contra affair.

Inman, 60, was head of the super-secret NSA, but seven years ago he left government service to become president of a Texas-based computer and high technology company, a government-backed consortium to combine the resources of many U.S. computer companies. That and another private technology venture failed, however, and recently Inman has served on private bank boards and government commissions.

Lilley, 63, served at the U.S. liaison office in Beijing in 1974-75 when Bush was the American envoy there. Born in China, Lilley was a career intelligence officer and served on the National Security Council staff. He has been a deputy assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs. He was ambassador to South Korea before Bush appointed him ambassador to Beijing.

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